



Serve

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Process Allows for Continuous Benefits for Disabled Foster Youth *Implementation of AB1331 (Evans)*

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and the federal Social Security Administration (SSA) recognize the importance of supporting foster youth as they transition out of foster care. Toward the goal of attaining continuous benefits for foster youth who were 'aging out' of foster care, CDSS Director John A. Wagner and SSA Commissioner Michael J. Astrue directed resources to establish a workgroup dedicated to solving policy issues that may delay, impede or provide a gap in the receipt of federal disability benefits upon exit from foster care for disabled foster youth. Both leaders recognized that a problem existed because disabled foster youth had to wait until after they 'aged out' to apply for disability benefits – known as Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment (SSI/SSP). This forced the foster youth to wait for months before they received their first SSI/SSP payment.

In 2007, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed AB 1331 (Evans) into law which required the CDSS to work with the SSA to develop a process which would allow California's 58 counties to transfer a foster youth's case from federal foster care benefits to state foster care benefits for one month. Disabled foster youth receiving SSI/SSP benefits would be put in a better position to successful transition into independent living by having resources upon emancipation; thereby diminishing their chances of homelessness. Working with the John Burton Foundation, the Public Interest Law Project, the Alliance for Children's Rights and the County Welfare Directors Association and other interested parties, CDSS got to work to make AB 1331 a reality.

In January 2008, the CDSS received unprecedented approval from the SSA to allow California's disabled foster youth to apply for SSI/SSP benefits before the age of 18. This important step allows SSA to accept and process an SSI/SSP application before a foster youth exits foster care and ensures eligible foster youth who are "aging out" can collect federal disability benefits. Eligible disabled foster youth can apply for SSI/SSP up to 12 months before they transition out of foster care.

In early 2010, the SSA issued a Program Operation Manual System (POMS) directive nationwide that allows for a similar process as currently in place in California to be applied in all 50 states. It is a significant accomplishment for California and a major relief for disabled foster youth.

Key Benefits of the New Process

- Provides foster youth with an important source of continual benefits and support.
- It is estimated that 15 percent of “aged out” foster youth are eligible for SSI/SSP benefits due to disability. In California, approximately 4,000 foster youth age out of foster care each year.
- From June 1, 2008 through March 31, 2010, there have been 674 cases received for processing.
- The maximum grant amount for a disabled individual is \$1,086 and the grant amount for a disabled individual living independently is \$907.
- The average grant amount for a disabled individual was \$635.00 for FY 2008-09.